United Nations TD/B/62/L.1/Add.1

United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

Distr.: Limited
17 September 2015

Original: English

Trade and Development Board
Sixty-second session
Geneva, 14–25 September 2015

Draft report of the Trade and Development Board on its sixty-second session

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, from 14 to 25 September 2015

Addendum

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President's summary

High-level segment: Development strategies in a globalized world: Role of women as a catalyst for trade and development

(Agenda item 2 (b))

1. The Secretary-General of UNCTAD opened the high-level segment. The following expert panellists made presentations: the World Bank Group Special Representative to the United Nations and the World Trade Organization; Director, Programme on Gender and Global Change, Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva (Switzerland); Board Member of the Council of Arab Businesswomen; and Chief Partnership Officer, African Development Bank. The discussions contributed to raising the level of political prominence of gender issues, while yielding insights into the relationship between trade, development and gender. The panel event tackled three facets of the gender and economics discourse: the impact of trade liberalization on women; women as catalysts of rural development; and women's economic empowerment within the post-2015 development agenda. More than 20 delegations expressed their views, backing UNCTAD's mandate on trade and gender and praising the results achieved.

2. Many delegations agreed broadly that women's economic empowerment paid high dividends for all societies and that providing quality education to women contributed significantly to economic growth. Beyond the economic case for gender equality, they acknowledged women's empowerment as a critical component of the sustainable development goals.

3. Several delegations acknowledged the role of women in trade and development, particularly through microenterprises and small and medium-sized enterprises, while noting the gender-specific obstacles that women faced. Legal and regulatory barriers to women's entrepreneurship and employment were still widespread across countries. Regulatory reform was needed to repeal formal discrimination in law. Some delegates indicated that mentalities and sociocultural attitudes should also change. Entrenched gender biases often prevented the translation of progressive legislation and policies into equal outcomes. The double burden of care and productive work constrained the economic potential of women.

4. The panellists and delegates agreed that trade liberalization did not have unambiguously positive effects on all and that the impact on women was sometimes double-edged. Women might simultaneously gain and lose from trade liberalization. In reviewing the experience of Germany, patterns of trade liberalization had been accompanied by a progressive "defeminization" of the farming sector. As for the Arab world, trade liberalization had largely benefited male-intensive sectors, notably energy and telecommunications; unemployment among well-educated women was among the highest in the world.

5. Economic development could lead to a reduction in gender-related inequalities, though this would not be an automatic process. Proactive measures were needed. For trade policy to be socially inclusive, implementation of complementary policies was needed, such as social policies that enabled women to balance family and work life, engendered rural development policies and education policies. Most importantly, the economic value of care work should be measured and acknowledged.